

THE BUILDER.

NO. XXIV.

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STATE OF THE IRON AND GENERAL MINING TRADE IN STAFFORDSHIRE.

THIS is a matter which is forcing itself upon our attention, and yet it is hardly right that we or the general public should require the peculiar force to which we advert to bring us to the consideration of so momentous a subject. Whole counties of people, and, taking them in the aggregate, an extensive province, are dependent on the iron trade, and the iron trade upon building and engineering structure. Can we be indifferent, then, to that severity of pressure under which so important a section of the building interests are suffering? We cannot, and henceforth it devolves upon us to apply our best ability to the question of remedial measures, in which purpose we shall be happy to be seconded by the practical and coincident views of any gentleman connected with the interests or the districts alluded to.

It is not now for us to inquire into the many and complicated causes that have produced the distress. We think at such a time this sort of inquiry is the most cruel and inconsiderate, not to say insulting—it is besides absurd—and sorry are we to find the influential public papers engaged in this sort of criminative abuse. Because, forsooth, a general stopper has overcome all our industrial interests, and that this of the iron trade is suffering perhaps most largely and severely in it, a consultation of "Job's comforters" is to be held, to outbid each other in revilings. The once glorious and much-boasted mercantile and manufacturing prowess of the "iron masters," their indomitable spirit of enterprise, which it was said (and said to nauseating, when we contrast it with present croakings and revilings), was the substance and spirit of our country's greatness; this! this is all forgotten now, or stigmatized as the madness of speculation, as having proceeded from a spirit of lustful ambition, of ill-calculating purpose, and the like, and master and men are bidden to sit on the dunghill of their present reproach to be mocked and spat upon by their own extravagant adulators. Forgive us, good readers, if we wax warm upon this subject; if we, who saw the vulgar eye fascinated by the glitter of seeming prosperity, find it now difficult to restrain ourselves, when that same eye greets the obverse of the bubble of its admiration with scornful and contemptuous glance, scanning even the surface of the objects of its contemplation, and "keening" never that which lay in the depths, which still lies there, which is of sterling and undying value. Forgive us! it is not our wont to be ruffled with trifles, but here is an impugning, and a revolt against the sovereign virtue and worth of hundreds of thousands of the choice of British industrial interests; and we are, in truth, shocked at the caprice, to say the least of it, of our "best possible instructors," of whom if we say anything too harsh, we humbly and earnestly entreat their pardon.

Not to dwell, however, upon this ungrateful topic, or branch of our topic; not even to take up the opposite, and, as we would contend, the true side of the argument, and to assert the blamelessness, the utter and absolute blame-

lessness of the sufferers,—not to insult them by a defence, or demean ourselves by whining and childlike condolings—we turn our attention, as we would have our mining and manufacturing friends turn theirs, at once and resolutely to the question of sound and practical remedial measures, to be deliberately taken in hand, and when taken in hand, to be perseveringly, steadily, and energetically pursued.

Let us not hope for any great paucity of promise, any marvellous portents of sudden deliverance; the relief, to be of a satisfactory nature, must be administered in small doses, with frequency, and on numerous hands. We are not to prescribe to a ministry, or to foist ourselves into a seat of ambitious counselling; but we do humbly think that different views of the treatment of this important question may be taken by those at the helm of power, and those for whom power is required to exercise its influences; and for the present we will confine ourselves to two points, not for the first time mooted, though, perhaps, we may present them in a different way.

The first is the question of railways for Ireland. Railways for Ireland would be good for Ireland; but how much more beneficial, in present effect at least, to England; and herein it was that the great mind of England's premier seemed to us to be particularly at fault in a late discussion, when dealing with the suggestions of Lord Howick and others for the promotion of a peace and prosperity engendering policy for Ireland.

We are not yet prepared to become politicians, good readers, however near it may appear that we are touching upon it, but so much was necessary to induct us in an argument for the resurrection or relief of the Iron trade.

The amount has been variously stated, and, in fact, can only be guessed at; but the sum of eleven millions has been put forth as that which the Irish railways would absorb; and then we have heard it objected to, by what we deem a one-sided consideration of the question—considerations as to how far Ireland was prepared for such extensive improvements, or would repay such an extensive outlay. The question was not put, or did not seem to us to have its proper weight assigned to it, first, how Ireland was to work its own proper and good account without such roads, and next how England—with its great machinery for road manufacturing, for iron roads and their various appliances and appurtenances—was to be sustained without a watchful and methodical continuance of the making of this new staple in trade, if we may so call it, of her people.

We have heard it said of the late Lord Castlereagh, that rather than keep the people in his parish unemployed, or pay them a pauper allowance for idling or walking about, he directed that they should dig holes and fill them up again, and we have always been less tempted to consider this a folly than the common plan of administering parish relief; but siding with neither, we thought it the duty of a great minister of a paternal government to be ever watchful against times of industrial depression, and that his capacity for rule would be best, and in no wise properly evinced, unless, with a skilful hand, he kept the balance of his sovereign's faithful and industrious dependents somewhat steadily poised—throwing in the make-weight of a legitimate influence of encouragement when this or that section or interest threatened to kick the beam. If we were right, and are still so,

then we take leave to contend that this is one of two or three serious calls for the exercise of his functions, and that he would be supported in its exercise by men of all parties; that, in fact, party would cease its functions in a cheerful purpose of unanimity, and that railways for Ireland, to praise her interests, to poise the interests of British labour and capital invested in, and dependent upon, such productions, if we may so call them, would be promptly and cheerfully acquiesced in by all. And this is not digging holes to fill them up again. Let never so little be done, it is to keep the wheel turning—it is, without a metaphor, to keep the furnace blowing—it is to prevent the rust of machinery and the corrosion of men's hearts—it is to distribute bread and bread's worth, while the non-distribution famishes, impoverishes, and bears down with merciless wrath. Of eleven millions, or the half of eleven millions of money spent in this manner, England would reap or retain the lion's share, but England and Ireland would be fed upon better than a dole, and experience better than a dole's fruition. Let us hope that without further of our own weak enforcements, this subject may speedily claim and obtain its due consideration.

Another point that requires attention may be managed by and among the iron-workers themselves. We have lately seen notices of a plan or suggestion by, we think, a Mr. Maclellan, for promoting the study of the arts of design, with a view to the introduction of iron-work more largely into the ordinary class of buildings; but the way in which he advocates it, would, we think, lead to little, if any thing of a remedy; it would, in fact, be something like "robbing Peter to pay Paul." It is to encourage designers and inventors to produce plans for substitution of iron in many cases for wood; that is, to substitute the services of Paul, the iron-worker, for Peter, the carpenter, and that Peter should be thrown upon any shift, no matter what, to serve himself. This is too much of the fashion of our working now-a-days. What is done should be done by the building crafts (among whom we of course enumerate the iron-worker) in concert, as though they acted in concert, not competing or undermining one another, but in the true spirit of brothers and as members of one large family of mutual and dependent interests.

Let the taste be cultivated, and not mere invention set on foot. Invention is the exercise of an ingenious mind; but there is such a thing as inventing mischief—taste, and here we may assign to it a wide province—takes cognizance of sound judgment, good feeling, propriety. Let invention be guided by taste of this calibre, and we have no fear for the result. Invention will then look out for unoccupied fields of enterprise and usefulness,—it will carry blessings in its train,—it will supply genuine wants, and not thrust in where there is already an over supply.

A great deal is to be done that is not done, and not thought of, and much of it in iron-work. But the public taste must be formed, and not that alone of the artists and artificers. New fields, as we have said,—nay, we may speak more strongly,—new worlds of and for useful and advantageous labour, remain to be created. Man, in the true direction and cultivation of his faculties, is a prime agent in this work of creation. GOD, directing all, will give to his people new and profitable desires, or wants, as he gives a legitimate and wisely-formed power of supply. He opens not mountains of gold without a purpose in its appropri-